

NEWS RELEASE

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USDA to Help Farmers and Ranchers Expand Habitat for Migrating Birds

Public-private effort will increase wetland habitat in eight states for migratory birds heading towards the Gulf of Mexico

TEMPLE, TEXAS, June 28, 2010 – State Conservationist Donald W. Gohmert today announced that USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) will work with farmers, ranchers, and other landowners to develop and enhance habitat for birds making their annual migration south towards the Gulf of Mexico. Under the Migratory Bird Habitat Initiative, NRCS will partner with producers to manage portions of their land to provide additional food and habitat for migrating birds.

Gohmert estimates \$750,000 for the initiative in Texas.

“More than 50 million migratory birds traveling south in coming months will instinctively head toward the marshes and coastlands of the northern Gulf of Mexico,” Gohmert said. “It has been well publicized that shorelines and marshes in other states have already been adversely impacted by oil from the Deepwater Horizon well. While Texas has not yet been impacted, we know our coastal wetlands are at risk especially as we move towards the peak of hurricane season. These wetlands are historic overwintering habitats for millions of migratory shorebirds and waterfowl. If these habitats are impacted by oil-laden water, the habitats expanded by farmers through this initiative will provide the birds high quality alternative wetlands on which to overwinter.”

The initiative encompasses portions of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, and Texas. NRCS, in cooperation with its conservation partners, has identified priority areas that offer the greatest habitat potential for migrating bird populations. NRCS anticipates improving habitat on up to 100,000 to 150,000 acres throughout the eight states, based on expected producer

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participation. Based on prior experience, NRCS hopes to see millions of birds coming to rest and feed in the priority areas.

Priority areas in Texas are in Brazoria, Calhoun, Chambers, Colorado, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris, Hardin, Jackson, Jefferson, Liberty, Matagorda, Orange, Waller, and Wharton counties with secondary priority given to the adjacent counties that include Aransas, Austin, Fayette, Grimes, Jasper, Lavaca, Montgomery, Newton, Polk, Refugio, San Jacinto, Tyler, Victoria and Washington counties.

“We expect there will be great interest from our farmers and ranchers who want to do something positive to help the migrating birds – not only this fall, but next spring and in subsequent years as well,” Gohmert said.

USDA will use conservation programs administered by NRCS and will work with partners, both public and private, to provide a variety of habitats to meet the needs of different species. Emphasis will be on creating or enhancing habitat for shorebirds and waterfowl, including shallow water and mudflat habitats. Of special interest are agricultural lands that contain wetlands farmed under natural conditions and prior converted croplands. Rice fields are particularly well-suited for this initiative.

USDA will deliver this initiative with the support from partners in Texas including Ducks Unlimited, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and associated Soil and Water Conservation Districts.

The signup for the initiative will run from June 28 to Aug. 1. Interested producers should contact their local USDA Service Center for additional information. More information is available at:

www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov/programs.

NRCS is celebrating 75 years helping people help the land in 2010. Since 1935, the NRCS conservation delivery system has advanced a unique partnership with state and local governments and private landowners delivering conservation based on specific, local conservation needs, while accommodating state and national interests. This migratory bird habitat initiative is emblematic of a partnership approach to natural resource conservation.